

HOPES AND HEARTS SINK AS TOOTING JUST PIP WYCOMBE

By Argus

Wycombe Wanderers 1,
Tooting and Mitcham 2

HEARTS sank at Loakes Park on Saturday as Tooting and Mitcham United, the talented South London terrors, enhanced their own considerable claims to the Isthmian League championship and cast a melancholy black shadow over the Wanderers' receding hopes.

This was not Wycombe's day. Everything that possibly could go wrong for them did go wrong. It was as if Irish Paddy Hasty, Tooting's goal-snatching centre-forward, had taken a lucky leprechaun on the field with him, for it was Paddy who headed an "impossible" goal to clinch the points off the one and only chance allowed him by experimental centre-half John Bartholomew.

On Saturday, the dice seemed heavily loaded against Wycombe. A hashed-up John Beck clearance which bounced off his own crossbar, presented Tooting with a "gift" opening goal. . . . Cliff Trott missed an equaliser by millimetres when his power drive came flying off the Tooting woodwork. . . . Paul Bates chose this day of all days to boob from the penalty spot. . . . on such incidents are soccer hopes blasted!

To cap Wycombe's sad encounter, right-winger Len Worley had his worst game of the season, passing erratically, dribbling in confusing circles and playing with a fraction of his usual zip.

To make matters much worse, Paul Bates was in his most puzzling and ineffective form in

his old familiar centre-forward spot, even allowing for a typically brilliant second-half goal which rallied the Wanderers.

SOUND DEFENCE

Tooting, who gave a characteristically highly disciplined and competent display, never showed the "killer" instinct nor the bursts of speed which wrecked and ravaged Wycombe in the corresponding game at Sandy Lane.

Containing the visiting attack comfortably enough for the majority of the game, the reconstructed Wycombe defence made few errors.

Looking vastly experienced, newcomer Bartholomew, making his first team debut, played very steadily against the enthusiastic Hasty. Just as cool were wing halves Dave Thomas, who kept slippery Alan Viney in check, and Jimmy Truett, the thundercloud on international Dave Roberts' horizon!

It was in attack that Wycombe faltered and looked most unlike League leaders. Cliff Trott, recalled to the line, charged about alarmingly and Fryer showed many deft touches, but the spark was missing and even when they did carve out openings, the home forwards were astray with their shooting.

PLAY WAS TENSE

In a cut-and-thrust first half both teams attacked in turn, with Wycombe having slightly more of the play. Play was tense and exciting without rising to any dizzy heights and both defences remained firmly on top. It took Hasty 23 minutes before he could shake off Bartholomew and test Ken Brown for the first time.

Trott was always prominent in Wycombe raids, but it was Fryer who went the nearest with shots from Worley and Free centres which ought to have produced goals.

Two dramatic minutes earned Tooting the points. With the visiting forwards breathing down his neck, Beck tried to boot the ball to safety and only succeeded in hitting his own crossbar a mighty thump. Ironically for Beck, Denzil Flanagan, the winger he had been marking so splendidly, was on the spot to score easily.

Hardly had the game been restarted when Trott crashed a great shot off the Tooting crossbar. Once again the bounce favoured the visitors.

OPPORTUNISM

In the 48th minute Hasty leapt high with Bartholomew and Brown and his blond head somehow glanced the ball into the net.

Opportunism wins matches, and how Wycombe could have done with an opportunist! The Wanderers kept up consistent pressure on the Tooting defence without ever looking like shattering it. Their biggest opportunity came when Harlow handled a Trott drive in the penalty area, but Bates, although he fairly rammed the ball goalwards, put his shot too near the acrobatic Wally Pearson, who juggled the ball away to safety.

Even Pearson could not hope to get within yards of the terrific Bates counterblast which made the score 2-1 to Tooting, but this belated blow came too near full time to save Wycombe, who were playing like a team with the fates against them.